



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

**MEETING: COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND
NEIGHBORHOODS**

DATE: APRIL 23, 2025

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

**PRESENT: COUNCILLORS BRIAN GOMES, CHAIR; IAN ABREU;
DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO (7:15); NAOMI
CARNEY; LEO CHOQUETTE; MARIA GIESTA; JOSEPH
LOPES; LINDA MORAD; SHAWN OLIVER; RYAN
PEREIRA**

ABSENT: NO ONE

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Councillor Gomes called the Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Baptiste, requesting, on behalf of D.F. PRAY, that the following street(s) be CLOSED: A PORTION OF EIGHTH STREET, from 13 Eighth Street to the corner of Spring Street, FROM MONDAY, MAY 5, 2025, AT 7:00 A.M. TO WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2025, AT 5:00 P.M., for the purpose of construction and renovation at 278 Union Street. (Matter ID #0320) (Referred – March 13, 2025.)

Councillor Baptiste stated that he had spoken with representatives from D.F. Pray regarding parking concerns, the effect on nearby businesses and the overall safety of the neighborhood, and he felt that everyone understood his concerns. He stated that his main objective was to make sure that everyone abutting the area was aware of what was taking place, and suggested that the issue be referred to the full City Council for “No Further Action”.

Councillor Morad advised the Committee that several abutters of the property in question were present and would like the opportunity to speak.

Michael Medeiros, 286 Union Street, New Bedford, was recognized and explained that his building is in the southwestern quadrant of the proposed construction. There is currently construction underway in the area abutting Minerva’s Pizza (280 Union Street) and it has created a parking issue. He has a parking lot in the rear of the building, with the driveway accessible by Eighth Street. He shared that he had spoken to the Project Manager at D.F. Pray about not being able to utilize his own parking lot and was informed that the street closure would stop at the end of the alley near the building on Eighth Street. This would allow his driveway to be accessible, and would work for him.

Thomas Benton, Project Manager for D.F. Pray, was recognized. Mr. Benton confirmed that the plan had been discussed with all of the neighbors as well as the Department of Public Infrastructure to achieve the best possible outcome for everyone.

Councillor Morad thanked Mr. Benton for working with the neighbors to alleviate the problem, however, she stated that there is still a parking issue due to D.F. Pray's subcontractors. She asked for assurance that they would address these issues, and added that she would take steps to revoke the street closure permit if necessary. She cited a number of issues with D.F. Pray, who have been working on other Downtown projects, including continually asking for extensions. She reminded D.F. Pray that this is a commerce area, and they need to remain on schedule.

On motion by Councillor Baptiste and seconded by Councillor Abreu, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Baptiste, requesting, on behalf of D.F. PRAY, that the following street(s) be CLOSED: A PORTION OF EIGHTH STREET, from 13 Eighth Street to the corner of Spring Street, FROM MONDAY, MAY 5, 2025, AT 7:00 A.M. TO WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2025, AT 5:00 P.M., for the purpose of construction and renovation at 278 Union Street.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods meet with downtown merchants, property owners and business owners to discuss their concerns and ideas on improvements in the downtown and historical areas, and use this discussion as an opportunity to work together on strategies that can be taken to address the need for increased police presence, cleaning and trash pickup, and other public safety issues in the area; and further, that the Police Chief, Fire Chief, Tourism Director, and a representative from the Mayor's Office and Department of Infrastructure be invited to said meeting. (Matter ID #1356) (Referred – August 13, 2024.)

Councillor Gomes explained the reason for his submitting this Motion was the result of the BID Program that came before the City Council, which he opposed. He wanted to call such a meeting to get everyone together to hear the concerns and ideas for improving the Downtown area. He went on to explain that his goal is to allow individuals who wish to speak the opportunity to do so, and the Council will listen and take into consideration the comments offered.

Councillor Pereira asked if there was a Communication from the Mayor's Office. The Clerk informed the Committee that the Office had received a Communication from the Administration stating that it would be represented by the Department Heads present at the meeting. Councillor Gomes confirmed that no one from the Mayor's Office was present at the meeting.

Councillor Gomes recognized individuals present who wished to speak.

Friar Alan Wharton of Our Lady's Chapel, Downtown New Bedford, was recognized. He said he was here as a property owner and as a resident of the Rectory, which is part of the Chapel. He explained that the concern for safety has grown since last summer with people congregating and actually living on the steps of the Downtown Main Public Library from 7:00 am to past midnight. They exhibit all kinds of chaos, anger and obscene language, fights breaking out which once resulted in a person being stabbed. After that incident, there was more of a Police presence, so the situation did improve. However, individuals have once again started to gather on the stairs of the Public Library.

Cheryl Bartlett, CEO of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, was recognized. Ms. Bartlett echoed the Friar's public safety concerns. She stated that last week alone, they too had a stabbing in front of the Health Center. She opined that the Police presence isn't what it used to be, and that public safety is her main concern.

Lauren Jazicki, contract-holder for the Keystone site, was recognized and shared that she is in the process of personally investing in the building and has been bringing investors to the Downtown area who have asked about safety in the area and Police presence. She also explained that those living in the building will be parking in the Zeiterion parking lot and will have to walk to and from that area, therefore, safety is her primary concern.

Tony Viera, Property Manager for First National Savings Bank, the Duff Building and the Time-Olympia Building in Downtown New Bedford, was recognized. He explained that there has been a noticeable lack of Police presence in the Downtown area, specifically since the Downtown Police Station closed. The area has a large number of people loitering in front of the Downtown Public Library, City Hall and the SRTA Bus Station. He has video from the Duff Building, which is directly across from City Hall, showing people doing crack and defecating. He went on to say that most of the offenders are known to local law enforcement, and that he would love to see increased Police presence in the area.

Juliet Loranger was recognized. She has been a Downtown business owner for the past sixteen years and is currently running a yoga studio. She said that while she does believe Police presence is important, there should also be more feet on the street addressing the issues. She suggested that we should attempt to learn from other cities that have experienced similar problems and what steps they have taken to correct them. She expressed frustration that her business is not doing well and while she takes responsibility for that, she would also like to take responsibility in coming up with a solution.

Jess Morgado was recognized and read a letter into the record from Downtown business owner Jenny Newman-Arruda, co-owner of TL6 The Gallery located at 100 William Street, who was unable to attend the meeting. The letter included suggestions on improving Downtown businesses and appearance, to include:

- Return cleaning up the area with a dedicated DPI worker
- Use the commuter rail to attract visitors to the downtown area
- Have a shuttle from the commuter parking lot to the downtown area
- Rescind the parking tickets back down to \$10.00
- Less aggressive parking meter attendants
- Advertise free street parking on weekends
- Incentives for downtown workers to rent parking space in the garages
- Work with the unhoused residents in the City, not against them
- Reinstate a dedicated downtown police officer
- Create a downtown drop-in center providing services
- Work with the Office of Tourism to create a QR code at the T-Station to attract visitors
- Place ads inside the cabins of the commuter rail

On motion by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Lopes, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file the letter submitted by Jenny Newman-Arruda.

Jess Morgado also offered her own comments, calling for restrooms in the Downtown area. She acknowledged there are a number of public restrooms, but they are not easily accessible.

Bill King, a Downtown resident for nineteen years, was recognized. He shared that five years ago, he also moved his business to the Downtown area. He stated that his concern is for the sidewalks and streets in the historic district. He cited that every corner is a trip-and-fall waiting to happen. While the City is taking steps to do repairs, a 10-wheel trash truck drives over a curb and the damage occurs again. Trash collection on Elm Street is very spotty; it is supposed to happen daily but recently it is only being collected twice a week.

Elissa Paquette, owner of Calico for the past twenty years and the President of Downtown New Bedford, Inc., was recognized. She expressed her dismay that the Mayor had chosen not to be present at this meeting, specifically as he uses Downtown New Bedford as a big talking point when he touts the City and was a big supporter of the BID proposal. She opined that what she finds frustrating is that while it is good have meetings, we already know what the issues are in the Downtown area since they have not changed over the past twenty five years, yet the City continues to talk about them. She said that whether it is lack of services for un-housed individuals or the need for increased Police presence, people have been asking for a neighborhood Police officer for a while. She stated that the 100% increase in parking tickets is of real concern. Downtown businesses are tired of talking about the same things over and over again without real change happening.

Bob Schilling, a resident of Downtown New Bedford, was recognized. He stated that yes, they need more Police in the Downtown area and added that this has been a consistent problem for a while. Mr. Schilling said there was a time when they had a beat person. He believes it would be ideal to have a two-officer patrol walking the beat Downtown. He shared that with the Star Store and Zeiterion Theatre closed, there is not much foot-traffic in the area lately. He is hoping that once the new apartments open in the Downtown area, it will bring a lot of new people into the area.

Jason Lanagan, a Downtown business owner, was recognized. He echoed a previous speaker's comments that these complaints have been ongoing for years and years. He stated that at times, the City has done a good job with having community Police officers, picking up trash, repairing sidewalks, and marketing New Bedford. However, the City is currently at a point where none of those things are being done consistently. He went on to say that if we want to grow as a Downtown, all of those things have to be done consistently, year after year, decade after decade. He said the City is moving into a new era where hundreds of people are moving into Downtown, which will create the need for a safe environment.

Marcus Coward, a New Bedford native and member of the City's Human Rights Commission, was recognized. Mr. Coward shared that he is hoping to become a Police Officer and that he is a part of a volunteer group called the New Bedford Health Initiative which has been active since 2019. It is an organization that provides those in need with items such as free clothing, blood pressure checks and more. He believes there should be more encouragement and incentives for volunteer groups to be a part of the Downtown solution.

Rhonda Fazio, a Downtown business owner with a shop on Pleasant Street, was recognized. Ms. Fazio shared that she has a fishbowl view of the activities that occur in the area. She would like to see the homeless solution addressed in the City. She has a concern that with late-night businesses operating in the area, Police details are not what they should be to address issues as they arise. She does not believe the Downtown Police Station should have been closed and she also expressed concern that the Wings Court area was shut down.

Paula Popeo, who lives on a property that abuts Wings Court, was recognized. Ms. Popeo explained that the reason the Wings Court area is locked is because abutters had terrible problems over the past few years when some homeless individuals had moved into the building's trash area. This became an issue as they were also using the area as a toilet. If there was policing and oversight of the area, then perhaps it could be used properly again by the City, but as it is now, it could pose a danger.

Ronny Getabli, owner of a new business in the Downtown area called The Corner Store, was recognized. Mr. Getabli stated that he wanted to meet those in the Downtown area who also have businesses and will work to help address the concerns that others have.

Matt Moyer Bell, who works with a number of nonprofit organizations in the Downtown area, was recognized. He believes that safety is a main concern, but unless we provide an outlet for the homeless to acquire the services they need, they will always return until that time. A facility that can provide services both day and night would be beneficial to addressing the homelessness issue in the Downtown area.

David Godinez, a member of the First Unitarian Church who works for a local nonprofit organization, was recognized. Mr. Godinez stated he does agree that a larger Police presence in the area is important, but he also feels that the involvement of nonprofits is necessary since many provide resources for those who need them. He also believes that nonprofits and Downtown businesses should get to know each other and work together to address many of the challenges in the area.

Brandon Roderick, owner of The Baker, was recognized. Mr. Roderick stated that he too has safety concerns, as his shifts begin at 11:00 pm. At times his baker, who is a young woman, does not feel safe getting out of her car to make it five feet to the door because people loiter and knock on the window when she is trying to work. He charged the City Council with a mission to seriously address the issues discussed in this meeting tonight. He also shared that he plans Downtown tours for students from local high schools. They are forced to adapt their tours because they want to expose these students to the best the Downtown area has to offer. The Council needs to determine what they want these young people to see and what they want them to experience.

Councillor Gomes informed the Committee that he had received a Communication from Department of Public Infrastructure (DPI) Commissioner Jamie Ponte stating that DPI has a litter pickup presence in the Downtown area Monday through Friday, including Wings Court and Custom House Square. This includes a mini-sweeper working between 5:00 am and 7:00 am. Street sweeping also occurs two days a week. Capital Waste Service picks up the trash, with the exception of Wings Court and Custom House Square, which are picked up by DPI. DPI also manages and has a landscaping service that maintains trees, grass, etc.

Councillor Gomes recognized New Bedford Deputy Police Chief Derek Belong to address some of the issues that had been discussed. Deputy Chief Belong said he understood the concerns presented. He shared that he was the former commander of the Downtown Police Station when it was open, and explained when the Downtown Station closed and the pandemic happened, policing shortages occurred. He said that unfortunately with the manpower reduction, they closed the Downtown Station and with it, the dedicated policing. He stated that currently, there is one neighborhood Community Police Officer that handles the Downtown area and the South End. He does believe there are more opportunities for Downtown policing, and promised to take all he has heard to review with the Chief and look to develop a plan to increase Police presence.

Councillor Abreu asked Deputy Chief Belong how he felt about the closure of the Downtown Station. The Deputy Chief replied that the real concern is not the closing of the station, but rather the low numbers in manpower that are necessary to address all of the needs throughout the City, adding that when you have less Police Officers, you have less officers in the neighborhoods.

Councillor Abreu also asked about the Detail Officer located in City Hall and whether it was possible for that Officer to make rounds once a day or so. Deputy Chief Belong explained all of the duties of that particular Officer and stated that while that Officer may be in a position to walk around the City Hall / Bus Station area, it may prove difficult to walk the entire Downtown area.

Councillor Oliver asked Deputy Chief Belong if he felt a two-man beat, boots on the ground, could see a comeback. The Deputy Chief answered that he did feel it could happen, and acknowledged that it is a huge component of community policing.

Ashley Payne, Director of Tourism and Marketing, was recognized.

Councillor Lopes informed Ms. Payne that he believes the City does a very good job at promoting the free two-hour parking during the Christmas season. However, he believes that the City does not do a good job promoting free parking on Saturdays and Sundays. He asked her if there was a way to utilize the same holiday tools and apply them to the weekends. Ms. Payne stated that there was a way to apply the same marketing formula and that she would have her Office look to do so.

Councillor Oliver asked Ms. Payne if she believed that meter parking, although a revenue stream, has a negative effect on tourism Downtown. Ms. Payne stated she has not received any feedback from visitors to the Downtown area indicating that it is an issue. She went on to say that her Office is working very hard to make communications stronger on how to use the City's parking app.

Councillor Abreu asked if the Office of Tourism and Marketing was receiving any negative feedback on safety or the unruly people in the Downtown area when visiting. She stated she was not and has actually been receiving very positive feedback recently from people who attended the New Bedford Half-Marathon and the Film Festival.

Councillor Gomes recognized Ms. Frangiadis, a business owner on William Street, who asked about the cameras in the Downtown area that had been purchased. She wanted to know if those cameras had been installed yet. Deputy Chief Belong was recognized and stated that the cameras are in and there is a local company that won the bid to install them. He went on to say that it is their hope to have the work done over the summer.

Councillor Gomes wrapped up the matter by stating that as a result of the failure of the BID, which many of the Council members were against, the Council had promised to meet with Downtown business owners and residents to listen to their concerns and move toward addressing them. He went on to say that many of the issues discussed this evening have been previously addressed, however it is the Administration that must enact them. He pledged that he and his colleagues would continue to work together for the betterment of the Downtown area.

On motion by Councillor Baptiste and seconded by Councillor Choquette, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council convene a roundtable discussion at the Downtown Library, to include the Mayor, at his earliest convenience, to further discuss the issues of Downtown business owners and residents. This motion passed on a roll call vote of Yeas 11, Nays 0.

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The following matter was not read:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Morad and Gomes, requesting that Chief Financial Officer Robert Ekstrom and Department of Facilities and Fleet Management Director Jennifer Vieira appear before the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods to review operational provisions within the Capitol Waste Services contract that are alleged to have been disregarded by the contractor and pose significant safety concerns for the company's employees and the residents of the City of New Bedford. (To be Referred to the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods, CFO Robert Ekstrom and DFFM Director Jennifer Vieira.) (Matter ID #0849) (Referred May 23, 2024.) (June 20, 2024 – RETURNED UNSIGNED by the Mayor.) (July 15, 2024 – tabled)

On motion by Councillor Lopes and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take “**NO FURTHER ACTION**” on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillors Morad and Gomes, requesting that Chief Financial Officer Robert Ekstrom and Department of Facilities and Fleet Management Director Jennifer Vieira appear before the Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods to review operational provisions within the Capitol Waste Services contract that are alleged to have been disregarded by the contractor and pose significant safety concerns for the company's employees and the residents of the City of New Bedford.

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Councillor Pereira made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Burgo.

The meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence, Jr.
Clerk of Committees